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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002514

SIPDIS

NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE. NSC FOR SHAPIRO/KUMAR. JOINT STAFF
FOR LTGEN SELVA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAELI REACTIONS TO GILO CONTROVERSY

REF: JERUSALEM 02063

Classified By: Acting Deputy Chief of Mission Marc J. Sievers for reasons 1.4 (b),(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Israelis across the political spectrum have lined up in support of Israeli expansion in Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem following the controversy over plans for new construction next to the existing neighborhood of Gilo (reftel). Many Israelis feel a strong connection to Gilo, one of the first Jewish neighborhoods founded in East Jerusalem following 1967, and have asserted, publicly and privately, that building in Gilo is just like building in Tel Aviv or Haifa. The building plan has not only received support from the political right, as opposition leader Livni, Labor party representatives, President Peres, and even members of the Meretz party have voiced their support for the "Israeli consensus" regarding the Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. The press, Israeli government officials, and the Israeli public are not making any distinction between construction of this new neighborhood adjacent to Gilo and construction within the long-established neighborhood of Gilo. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Frictions with the U.S. and EU over the Jerusalem District Planning Board's approval of a plan for construction of 844 residential units adjacent to the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo was the subject of much discussion in Israel this week, with many Israelis interviewed in the media expressing a lack of understanding of the U.S. and European criticism. There appears to be a broadly held view among Israelis that the Jewish neighborhoods constructed in East Jerusalem since 1967 are as much a part of Israel as Tel Aviv or Haifa. The perception that the Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem are fully a part of Israel is deeply ingrained as a fact, probably stemming from the rapid annexation of East Jerusalem after 1967 and the subsequent integration of the newly constructed Jewish neighborhoods into the life of the city. Gilo in particular resonates with the Israeli public because it is located near the center of the city and its residents endured periodic sniper fire from nearby Arab neighborhoods during the Second Intifada.

¶3. (SBU) The public's view of construction in East Jerusalem Jewish neighborhoods is echoed across much of the political spectrum. It is no surprise that the right wing parties and the center-right Likud - which together account for 65 seats in the 120-seat Knesset - support Netanyahu's position that building in Jerusalem is distinct from the West Bank and should not be subject to a deal on restraining construction in settlements. However, Kadima, Labor, and even some in the leftist Meretz party also view these neighborhoods as part of Israel's capital and expect them to be retained in any future settlement. A spokesman for Minister of Welfare Yitzhak Herzog (Labor) emphasized that point, telling poloff that "Gilo is no different from anywhere else in Israel." An aide to Meretz MK Nitzan Horowitz told poloff that he agreed that

Israel had the right to build in Gilo, but he stressed that with a stalled peace process, authorizing construction now was a mistake.

¶4. (U) Opposition leader Tzipi Livni was quoted in the press November 18 as telling visiting French Foreign Minister Kouchner that there is Israeli consensus on the neighborhood of Gilo, while the Yisrael Ha-Yom daily November 19 quoted President Peres as saying, "There is no doubt that Gilo is located within sovereign Israel and that it is impossible to change the current reality of life in the area." Peres went on to say, "For years there have been differences of opinion between the U.S. and Israel concerning the status of Jerusalem. The differences of opinion are not new, but despite everything Israel always continued to conduct negotiations to advance peace with the Palestinians."

¶5. (SBU) Embassy contacts in the Israeli anti-settlement NGO community concede that the well established East Jerusalem settlement of Gilo will almost certainly remain in Israeli hands in any final status agreement. In conversations with Econoff on 18 November, they distinguished between such well-established East Jerusalem neighborhoods as Gilo, Pisgat Ze'ev and Newe Ya'akov and the more problematic Jewish enclaves being established within Palestinian neighborhoods, but asserted that even construction in consensus areas, especially when it expands a site's footprint, demonstrates a lack of GOI commitment to the peace process and an attempt to predetermine final status boundaries before they can be negotiated.

¶6. (C) Comment: Given the strong support among Israelis for
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construction in Gilo, some in the GOI probably intentionally leaked the issue in order to consolidate this public support while signaling the GOI's intention to hold firm on its position regarding Jerusalem. In doing so, the GOI appears to have discounted the potential effect on the Palestinians of elevating the public visibility of this issue.

CUNNINGHAM